



November 23, 2018.

The LGBTQ students of Ventura deserve to be safe and protected, loved and honored, and to know they are valued and supported by all members of the Ventura Unified School District. We must live up to our goal of "consistent, enthusiastic and unwavering encouragement of each and every child—so they can discover who they want to become and be academically, personally, and socially." The recent stance on Pride Week by the administration at Foothill Technology High School and VUSD administration is wrong and hurtful. LGBTQ Pride is not political nor controversial; supporting a vulnerable and marginalized population is neither of those things. It is the right thing to do. FTHS students and staff, LGBTQ and otherwise, deserve to publicly show what they have always known: at FTHS, LGBTQ students are safe, loved, and celebrated.

Further, it has come to light that in 2015-16 David Creswell, our Superintendent, delivered a number of sermons to his home church. One in particular was hurtful and harmful. The sermon ridiculed a high school-aged lesbian couple and a transgender young woman because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. These words, and the values they represent, are not our VUSD values. These words and beliefs jeopardize the security and well-being of our vulnerable LGBTQ students, families and staff. These words are divisive and damaging, and may have provided encouragement for bullies across our schools to target our LGBTQ students. The Ventura Unified Education Association stands firm in its refusal to accept anything that can lead to emotional or physical harm to any student, any family, or any staff member. We are committed to seeing our LGBTQ students thrive. These students deserve our love and care, not ridicule and condemnation.

We realize that Dave Creswell was speaking at his church during his own time, before he was hired as our Superintendent. However, at the time he was employed by a public school district. He was making comments about students he saw in a high school yearbook. His role as a public educator was made clear in his sermon; he made the link himself. We are concerned at the suggested overlap of these two distinct roles.

Dave Creswell has since apologized for his words, and his offensive sermon has been removed from the church website at his request. Creswell said he no longer not believes the things that he said then. He presents himself as a changed man. Many of our members, however, feel that the damage has been done and is irreparable. Still others feel that if even one student is harmed by this, that is too many.

It is also true that many members like Creswell. They respect him for his leadership through the Thomas Fire, for his work with Racial and Social Justice and Ethnic Studies at VUSD, and for his personal work for at-risk youth throughout the world. Many of us know Creswell, and after working with him, were dismayed at his words and felt betrayed.

Some members feel he was within his rights to speak as he did; some members share the conservative Christian values he expressed about the LGBTQ students. There is room within VUEA for diverse personal beliefs and faiths. We need to be clear: Christianity and religion are not the problem. Some members facilitate student-led prayer groups at schools, many are active in their home churches, synagogues or mosques. Tolerance and acceptance is our shared standard.

The problem is the hurtful words and the harm they can do, and are doing, to our students.

Educators believe people can change. Our job is to watch people grow and educate and help along the way. We guide and nudge, we grade essays and correct math problems, we nurse and counsel, we recommend the right book and when called on, we help with correctly pronouncing your vowels. We believe that every student deserves a future, and, therefore, every person does as well.

The VUEA has struggled over next steps and recommendations. There are a few very clear recommendations:

1. Foothill Technology High School administration needs to be actively guided by VUSD to mandate respect and support for LGBTQ students, and all other minority and marginalized students. The staff there has always known this; it's time for the administration to be held accountable.
2. VUSD needs to increase its active and visible support for LGBTQ students, families and staff. These students are vulnerable, these families need support, and these staff members need to know they are protected and valued. There is a glaring lack of LGBTQ administrators at the sites and at the district office. We are not calling for diversity hires; we want the very best for our students. When LGBTQ educators, administrators and professional staff members across the state come to believe that VUSD is truly diverse and accepting, they will make their way to us. But VUSD must reach out first. We don't need another rebranding, but we do need to fully embrace the 'every' in our current slogan.

VUEA has also been struggling with our recommendation for Dave Creswell. While there are many who believe that the damage is done and Creswell needs to go, there are others that feel Creswell has done nothing wrong. Most want to keep him and educate him. The hard-fought consensus of the LGBTQ committee for VUEA, and the comments from the members, is: Creswell's comments were inexcusable, but he deserves a chance to change and grow. We want to believe that he has changed and the change is ongoing. We hope that as the realities of life for LGBTQ students become known to him, he will become a champion for them. Our love for our students is unconditional; however our support for Creswell isn't. These recommendations are made based on what we know of the events at FTHS and the sermons in Creswell's past. If new information comes to light, our recommendations may change. VUEA needs:

1. A commitment from the board to create a task force for LGBTQ issues.
2. A commitment from the board to take the continuing recommendation from the LGBTQ task force when evaluating Creswell for continued or future employment.
3. Creswell's private beliefs are his own, but it must be made clear to him that his public behavior as the face of our district must be supportive and respectful for each student.
4. Creswell needs to go to every school site and make himself available to the staff and students to answer their questions and outline the steps he and the district are going to take.

There are some VUEA members who feel this is the wrong direction for VUEA to take. There are community members who feel the same. We are hoping our fledgling faith in Creswell and the board is well placed. The future of every student depends on it.

Resolution from the Ventura Unified Education Association committee for LGBTQ rights.  
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Ventura Unified Education Association.  
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